United Nations A/HRC/29/NGO/4

General Assembly

Distr.: General
3 June 2015

English only

Human Rights Council
Twenty-ninth session
Agenda item 3
Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by the International Federation of University Women, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[20 May 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE.15-11185 (E)
1511185

Please recycle

Full Realisation of the Right to Education for Girls and Women

The International Federation of University Women (IFUW) is based in Geneva, Switzerland, and has an international membership. Founded in 1919, IFUW is the leading girls' and women's global organisation advocating for women's rights, equality and empowerment through access to lifelong, quality education and training up to the highest levels. IFUW promotes education across four key areas: secondary education; tertiary education; continuing education; and non-traditional education.

The Background

The human right to education is unequivocally enshrined in core international agreements and treaties including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention against Discrimination in Education, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the International Convention on the Elimination Against All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. The Human Rights Council has also repeatedly promoted the right to education, beginning with the 2008 Resolution 8/4, which *inter alia* emphasises the right to education for girls and persons belonging to vulnerable groups. The Council has since adopted several follow-up resolutions on education including Resolutions 11/6, 15/4 and 17/3, calling on states to significantly accelerate their commitments to realise the goals set out in the Education for All agenda.

The issue

Despite the widespread global recognition of the right to education, the international community as a whole is not on track to meet the most fundamental education target of achieving universal primary education. Fifty-eight million children of primary school age and sixty-three million adolescents are not in school today, the majority of whom are girls.[1] The gender gap in accessing and completing quality education is clearly illustrated by female illiteracy rates: almost two thirds of the seven hundred and eighty one million illiterate people in the world are women,[2] seventy-six million of whom are girls aged 15-24 years.[3] IFUW believes that literacy is more than just an exclusive privilege for the world's wealthy. Literacy is a fundamental life skill and a key component of the right to education; it is the cornerstone of personal autonomy, social inclusion and economic empowerment. Full realisation of the human right to education, however, must extend beyond the provision of basic literacy and numeracy skills developed at primary level, and should also include critical life skills including financial and digital literacy.

Poverty and illiteracy are not the only hurdles facing girls and women in their pursuit of equal access to quality education, in particular secondary education. Other barriers include:

- Harmful practices that specifically target girls and adolescent young women including early, forced and child marriages, which often see the young brides removed from education;
- Threats of physical or sexual violence, bullying or harassment, while travelling to or from school or while on school premises;
- A lack of suitable and safe sanitation facilities, which often result in girls staying at home during menstruation;
- Living in conflict zones: where instruction may have been suspended, where it is unsafe to access schools or where students have been displaced;
- A need to travel significant distances to reach secondary school, particularly in rural areas;

---

[1] UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report *Education For All 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges*, April 2015.

[2] UNESCO Institute for Statistics Fact Sheet *Adult and Youth Literacy*, September 2014.

[3] UNESCO *Literacy rates are rising, but women and girls continue to lag behind*, 6 September 2013.

- Curricula that do not meet the specific linguistic or other needs of girls from certain vulnerable groups, including ethnic and indigenous minorities;
- Multiple barriers to the education of disabled girls, including inaccessible or difficult to access premises and facilities, as well as ill-adapted teaching methods;
- A shortage of female teachers or female-only schools in places where sex segregation is required for girls to attend schools; and
- Cultural prejudice regarding the role of women in society that prevents girls from accessing education due to a responsibility to undertake domestic duties and caregiving.

IFUW's position and recommendations

IFUW affirms and emphasises the right to education as a standalone international human right and an enabler of numerous other human rights, which must be promoted, protected and provided to all people without discrimination. Education is a catalyst for multisector socio-economic progress including:

- enhancing sustainable development;
- fostering fiscal growth;
- combatting poverty;
- eradicating illiteracy; and
- promoting tolerance and peace.

There is a concrete and direct correlation between the most fundamental human right of all – the right to life – and its intrinsic connection with the right to education. By providing mothers with a primary level education, maternal death rates would fall by two thirds – saving almost one hundred thousand lives.[4] Extending this paradigm to include mothers with a secondary education, child deaths would be reduced by half, saving a further three million lives.[5]

IFUW strongly shares the position of the Special Rapporteur on Education that primary education is not enough: *To ensure that education is relevant and useful, education goals in the post-2015 development agenda should have the objective of achieving by 2030 universal secondary-level education for all, with vocational and technical education and training as an integral part in order to respond to the rising aspirations of youth and to meet the critical challenges of an increasingly globali[s]ed economy.*[6] IFUW sees access to, and completion of, quality secondary education as a critical means to empower girls and women by providing them with the skills and knowledge – academic, social and personal – that they will need to progress further in higher education, work and society.

To strengthen the human right to education, in particular for girls and women, IFUW recommends:

- All states should sign, ratify and implement in national law **all** international human rights treaties, recognising that human rights are universal, inalienable, indivisible, interdependent, and interrelated;
- All stakeholders and policy makers, especially within the fields of education and international development, should adopt, implement, accelerate, and adequately finance measurable plans of action to increase access to, and completion of, all levels of education for all people. This includes full multistakeholder, multilateral commitment to implementing the post-2015 agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 4 (education) and Goal 5 (gender equality);
- Particular commitment and tailored support should be guaranteed for at-risk groups to access education, especially girls and women with disabilities, those of rural, indigenous or migrant background, and those displaced by war;

[4] UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report Fact Sheet *Girls' education – the facts*, October 2013.
[5] UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report Fact Sheet *Girls' education – the facts*, October 2013.
[6] Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Kinshore Singh – Report on the Post-2015 Education Agenda. UN Doc. A/68/294, 9 August 2013.

- To ensure continued progress in knowledge dissemination and innovation, and to bridge both gender and poverty gaps, states must recognise the lifelong nature of learning for girls and women, which critically includes secondary, tertiary, continuing, and non-traditional education;
- States and education sectors should prioritise the implementation of universal access to free, quality secondary education, including by providing financial incentives and support to keep girls from the poorest families in school;
- Local, national and international literacy campaigns should be launched to combat global illiteracy. Specific, relevant and measurable targets are critical to effectively monitor implementation and progress. In the face of modern-day technological advancements and necessities, literacy must include financial and digital literacy, as well as functional competencies of reading, writing and numeracy. States should invest in the compilation, publication and dissemination of gender- and age-disaggregated data that evaluate literacy levels of all its population. Literacy shou'd also be assessed along a continuum, as supported by UNESCO;
- Local and national governments, education, health, and justice sectors and international policy makers must prioritise the vulnerable situation of the girl child in public policy campaigns and actions at all levels. States should introduce and implement relevant national legislation, with particular emphasis on combatting child, early and forced marriage, and should ratify international commitments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriage; and
- Human rights education must also be introduced, both institutionally at schools and informally within communities, in order to raise awareness of the rights of all individuals and the responsibilities of states. Men and boys must be included in all dialogue on human rights education, where both genders should be encouraged to work together as partners and not adversaries.